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**Creating an environment at the national and international levels
conducive to generating full and productive employment and
decent work for all, and its impact on sustainable development**

**Statement submitted by the Association de volontaires pour le
service international, a non-governmental organization in
consultative status with the Economic and Social Council**

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

* E/2006/100.



Statement

Introduction

A. First of all, we would like to express our gratitude to ECOSOC for taking up the very important theme of employment for sustainable development, and in particular as it concerns youth and women. On behalf of the AVSI network, a non-profit international development NGO present in 32 countries in linking 23 local level partner organizations, we would like to share some of the lessons learned and summary considerations drawing from long-term work in a variety of developing country contexts. The focus of this statement will be youth employment and some fundamental principles to be integrated into the discussion of national and international policies.

B. For many years now, AVSI has supported initiatives and programs directly managed with local partner organizations and in collaboration with the private sector, public and governmental institutions, and other peer organizations and service providers. Interested in bolstering the dignity of all youth, AVSI has supported those organizations engaged in helping youth find dignity through decent work, both as employees and as self-employed. Beyond facilitating job-entry, AVSI and its local partners are concerned also about the young person's ability to stay on the job and progress towards goals of professional development.

AVSI is present in various countries, with youth employment services concentrated mainly, but not exclusively, in the urban settings of:

- Nairobi, Kenya
- Belo Horizonte, Salvador da Bahia, and Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Kampala, Uganda, and other regions of the war-torn north
- Buenos Aires, Argentina
- Freetown, Sierra Leone

B1. In **Kenya**, the Nairobi based NGO, Companionship of Works Association (COWA) and AVSI-Kenya started a Support Center in 2000 to help the graduates of the St. Kizito Vocational Training Institute to find employment. In the first few years of its operation, the Support Center helped thousands of youth prepare for and find their first jobs, initiated contact with over one hundred local companies, and began supporting young people interested in starting their own enterprises. In **Kampala, Uganda**, a similar program has been underway since 1993, with particular focus on youth released from a juvenile prison in Kampala, as well as for street children and young AIDS orphans, primarily girls. In both cases, training and job-placement assistance is not only a goal of the project, but also a tool to assist the young people to recover confidence in themselves and in life. In the northern regions of Uganda where civil conflict has displaced almost the entire population and HIV/AIDS is taking a heavy toll, AVSI has insisted that support for youth employment cannot be overlooked. Instead, AVSI works with the youth in the internally displaced persons (IDP) camps and with young people living with HIV/AIDS to support their base of technical skills and business know-how.

B2. In **Brazil**, AVSI and *Cooperacao para o Desenvolvimento e Morada Humana* (CDM) have created a similar resource center that uses a four-dimension approach: vocational training, job placement, technical assistance and credit management for self-employed. This effort was successful within the broad scope of a physical and socio-economic upgrading program implemented by AVSI over many years. One

indicator of the center's work success has been a business cooperative of young bricklayers and builders that has consolidated enough experience to win procurement bids which are normally awarded to contractors from outside of the favelas.

Fundamental Principles for Youth Employment

C AVSI would like to set forth four fundamental principles that, according to our accumulation of experiences, cannot be overlooked in the planning and implementation of youth employment interventions.

Value of Work

C1. The value of work through a dignified productive job is not only a means of earning a living, but also it is a means of personal expression that allows one to be more human. All work, even manual labor, is conducive to the expression of the human personality and the desire to be the protagonist in life; the tendency of some "civilizations"—or ways of thinking—old and new, to consider manual labor a disgrace can be an obstacle to human development.

Meaning of Education

C2. Education must be considered not only in terms of literacy and numeracy skill attainment, but also as a process of building self-awareness and the subsequent capacity of understanding reality. The central role of the educator—someone who introduces the young person to reality and its meaning while putting into motion one's energy—cannot be underestimated. The result is an educated person who has the willingness to face the reality of one's self and one's surroundings.

Adult Support

C3. Young people need to be accompanied by adults who have the energy, ability and love to take care of them as individuals maturing into adulthood, together with the growing set of both responsibilities and desires for self-fulfillment. In many urban settings of the developing world, conditions of broken families (and in particular absent fathers) and crippling poverty have created a vacuum in which young people are left on their own without needed accompaniment. The transition from school to work is particularly sensitive. Even when the "invisible hand" of the market forces or government policies has meant the existence of job opportunities for young people, most youth still need a "visible hand" to face reality and to take the first steps towards the job market.

Technical Skills

C4. In many contexts, technical schools are looked upon as a second-tier preparation, and thus less importance is given to their quality, flexibility to the demands of the labor market, responsiveness to student need, and financial support. For many young people in developing countries, learning a trade is the best, most effective means of securing a job that can be both a source of income and a dignified occupation with opportunities for growth. National policies should support dynamic technical and vocational educational opportunities and encourage linkages between such institutions and the private sector.

Inputs to the Public Policy Debate

D One significant challenge is always to link the lessons learned in practice with the level of public policy formulation and debate.

Building on Success

D1. Policy development must give priority attention to actual initiatives that have proven successful, which in most cases are being implemented at the grass-roots levels. Critical review of these cases is necessary to understand the factors fundamental to the successful approaches, as well as the shortcomings, and to draw inspiration for policy directions. Too much time is dedicated to fine-tuning action plans and adding recommendations to recommendations, and usually less time and fewer resources to learning from, evaluating, and reinforcing those interventions that are currently being tested.

Collaboration of Multiple Stakeholders

D2. To foster employment among youth, coordination of many actors and various measures is needed. The great diversity of personalities, life situations, capacities and desires of young people in a given environment implies that an intervention aimed at supporting young people as a whole must be prepared to offer a variety of support services. Likewise, concerns of both sustainability and effectiveness suggest the need to involve the public sector (and in particular local government entities and officials), as well as the private sector businesses, education sector, and civil society actors such as service providing NGOs.

Elements of Method

D3. Drawing on the concrete programs and centers for youth employment supported by AVSI primarily in Latin America and Africa, we can select out the following points of method which have been fundamental to the successes achieved:

- Creation of stable points of reference for youth
- Comprehensive range of services for youth employment: both formal employment and the needs of entrepreneurs/ start-up businesses
- Focus on desire and attitude
- Delivery of professional-level, quality services
- Bridging the gap between youth, school and employers
- Facilitate networking

D3.a. A stable reference point for youth refers to a concrete place where young people can access a combination of employment related skills and resources. The major aim of these reference centers is to act as a catalyst of a supportive relationship. The urban environment in particular is characterized by fragmentation, isolation, violence and struggle, where the fabric of society has lost the texture of solidarity and common support. The youth employment centers should offer an ongoing relationship, rather than one-time service. Through this approach, young people find more than a library of resources, but can encounter people who are interested in them as individuals. The very visible outcome of these interventions is that young people regain self-confidence and discover within themselves a great capacity for initiative and action, thus making it easier for them to become active job-seekers capable of grasping opportunities.

D3.b. A comprehensive range of services and resources is necessary to assist young people in facing all of the challenges related to finding, securing and succeeding in the job market. On one hand, information, CV preparation, application letter writing, interview preparation, job search skills, and

identification of acquired skills and natural talents can be delivered through a coordinated process that gives the young people the opportunity to become an active and creative player. Similarly, when dealing with entrepreneurship, it is not sufficient to support the young entrepreneur with only financial resources. The whole entrepreneurial undertaking is taken into consideration, from the business mindset, to business concept generation, to practical skills, financial management and ultimately capital start-up resources.

D3.c. Young people in marginalized, depressed urban settings often need support simply to raise their spirits and expectations about what is possible for them to achieve and contribute to society. Responsibility, realism, creativity, interest in sustained learning, positive attitudes towards work, honesty and the desire for self-fulfilment, all of these are fundamental resources that are to be nurtured in a young person. Clearly these are not only characteristics of a positive self-image, but are also the qualities any human resource manager looks for in new workers. Human capital development is given a boost when interventions on youth employment are linked to a broader development of the human resources of young people.

D3.d. Highly professional services are necessary for successful engagement of young people in youth employment support interventions. This point is very clearly demonstrated by both the successes and failures of attempted projects. Young people prefer direct, on-the-ground and needs-oriented interventions, motivated and well-trained staff, continuous upgrading of services, and sound use of resources.

D3.e. Bridging the gap between schools and employers is important for smoothing the crucial transition faced by young people. Encounters with human resource managers, technicians, and entrepreneurs can be facilitated within the school setting, thus increasing the exposure of young people to the range of skills valued by the job market and the expectations of a variety of employers. An effective and relevant use of apprenticeship or internship opportunities gives many young people the chance to become familiar with the environment of work first hand. Courses that provide orientation to work and introductions to self-employment can offer students a broader view of employment options and ignite creativity and passion at an earlier moment.

D3.f. Networking is a crucial task for any job-seeker and yet the complexity of urban areas can be daunting to a single young person. As a key organizational strategy, networking among businesses, other service providers, and entrepreneurs enables a youth employment service center to provide more effective assistance to the young clients since interventions are not offered in isolation but integrated within a web of relationships.

Conclusion

E. The framework needed to support such interventions capable of catalyzing change among young people includes a suitable and consistent role of the government (ministry and agencies at the national and local levels) that structures an enabling environment in which different actors, including the private sector and the non-profit sector, can effectively coordinate to tackle youth unemployment. This environment should consist of clear goals set by government policy, as well as the means of evaluating results achieved. In addition, the government should provide budget allocations that are made available for non-governmental service providers to demonstrate their capacity and results.